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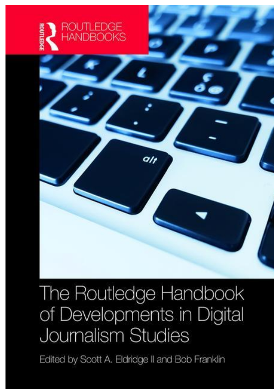

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Silencing the Female Voice

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32

SILENCING THE FEMALE VOICE

The cyber abuse of women on the internet

Pamela Hill Nettleton

For a woman journalist in 2017, working on Twitter entails opening oneself to attacks such as:

> "I hope you get raped" (Just Not Sports, 2016)."You need to be hit in the head with a hockey puck and killed" (Just Not Sports, 2016)."You are clearly retarded, i hope someone shoots then rapes you".
>
> *(Hess, 2014)*

The internet is touted as a democratic space in which nationality, class, race, gender, and sexuality are rendered neutral. However, receiving digital media threats of violence, rape, and murder are daily occurrences for female journalists. Internet harassment of women marginalizes their professional presence online, impinges on their freedom of communication, and, in an echo of outdated and retrograde domestic violence attitudes, is minimalized and dismissed by law enforcement and media publishers. Stalking, bullying, and intimidation that would not be tolerated in brick-and-mortar workplaces are commonplace in comments, emails, tweets, and social media related to the online work of female journalists. Studies in this emerging field point to an ugly truth: the anonymity and ubiquity of the internet works to shelter and protect harassers and to allow the cyber sexual harassment of women and marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) persons.

This chapter gathers key literature in the growing area of research into cyber sexual harassment, points to some promising directions, draws parallels between cultural responses to it and to domestic violence, and recounts key instances of harassment, stalking, and threats of physical violence online. This reveals that the digital world is the newest location for age-old male behaviors of intimidation and violence against women. A discussion follows about the significance of online gender violence and recommendations for addressing and limiting it.

The following sections explore existing research on cyber gender harassment, how digital space is conceptualized, and how domestic violence in the physical world is characterized.

The gendered nature of the internet

From its inception, the internet has had a reputation for misogyny. In practice, individuals engaging in cyber gender harassment effectively police online areas and attempt to render

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them male-only spaces, disciplining women for transgressing into male territory. During the mid-1990s, women who resisted demeaning comments from men on internet 'list-servs' and recreational channels were blamed for causing the comments by their very presence (Herring, 1996). The internet evolved with built-in gender disparity, using language and interaction styles that were familiar and advantageous to men and downright hostile to women (McCormick and Leonard, 1996). Characteristics of digital spaces that allow and support harassing behavior include anonymity (McGarth and Casey, 2002), lack of eye contact (Lapidot-Lefler and Barak, 2012), and an easy escape route (Barak, 2005), which work together to create user disinhibition (Barak and Fisher, 2002). Online users employ bolder sexual behaviors online than they would do in person (Cooper et al., 2002). And the plethora of pornographic sites contributes to a sexualized atmosphere of male space (Döring, 2000). In some ways, the internet is the 'Wild, Wild West', operating with limited legal sanctions (or at least the belief that there are few sanctions) and an absence of authority figures (Barak, 2005). In the physical world, sexual harassment is addressed through education of victims and harassers, organizational cultural changes, and laws (Paludi and Paludi, 2003), but online, free speech, libel, and slander laws as they pertain to the internet are unclear and enforcing them problematic (Hiller and Cohen, 2002). Legal challenges arise from the fragmented nature of criminal and civil law, out-of-date laws that don't consider the internet, and the failure of law to address systemic gender violence (Henry and Powell, 2015). In short, a harasser is free to be anti-social and aggressive without fear of being discovered or punished, existing in a community of others behaving equally badly and egging each other on (DeKeseredy and Olsson, 2011). The design, policies, and governance structures of certain sites attract and shelter anti-feminist activity (Massanari, 2017), such as #Gamergate (a campaign of harassment of women in the gaming industry) and 'the Fappening' (illegally distributed celebrity nudes, such as Jennifer Lawrence) at Reddit (Massanari, 2017: 330).

Nomenclature

As the phenomena has evolved and scholarly attention to online violence against women has increased, the nomenclature for it is in flux. Karla Mantilla draws distinctions between cyberharassment, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, revenge pornography, blackmail videos, and the like (2015); Henry and Powell refer to these and other harassments as technology-facilitated sexual violence (2015). 'Gendertrolling' is a term well-explicated by Mantilla (2015) as brought about by a woman stating her opinion online, resulting in attacks that are graphic, sexualized, and gender-based, often including credible rape and death threats and physical stalking. Attacks are intense, occur frequently, continue for months or years, cross online platforms, and may involve many trolls working together in ways that are "exponentially more vicious, virulent, aggressive, threatening, pervasive, and enduring than generic trolling" (Mantilla, 2015: 11). "Cyber gender harassment" is Danielle Citron's term for harassment invoking stereotypical gender roles, suggesting female journalists return to the kitchen or go home and have babies, threatening rape or murder, and particularly demeaning women of color and lesbians (2009). For the purposes of this chapter, all variations are included in and referred to as 'cyber gender harassment'.

Prevalence

Cyber gender harassment is a worldwide phenomenon – the internet has no national boundaries. The harassment of women journalists is insidious, says a report from Australia: 41% of in-house journalists and 18% of freelancers have been made the target of obscene, violent, and harassing tweets, comments, and postings (Uther, 2015). Philips and Morrissey (2004) estimate one-third of female internet users have experienced cyber gender harassment; Barak (2005) estimates

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40%. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe calls cyber gender harassment an attack on fundamental freedoms that "limits the sharing and receiving of information and constitutes a serious obstacle to online plurality, thereby restricting the freedoms and rights of society as a whole" (Mijatović, 2016: 2) and is "the most prevalent human rights violation in the world" (Antonijevic, 2016: 9). It is prevalent but underreported due to shame, embarrassment, and the tendency of law enforcement to dismiss it (Citron, 2009). Working to Halt Online Abuse has tracked online harassment at the rate of 50–75 cases a week since 1997, though statistics are limited to self-reports and estimated to be low. Most victims are single, white women between 18 and 40 years of age; most harassers are male, and about one-fourth of cases escalate into physical violence (WHOA, 2015). A Pew Research Center study found that 75% of adult internet users have witnessed someone being harassed online, 40% have been harassed themselves, and 18% of those (including a disproportionate percentage of women under the age of 24) have been digitally stalked, sexually harassed, and physically threatened (Duggan, 2014).

Marginalized populations like the LGBTQ community are also targeted (Barnes, 2001). The first statistics about online harassment of LGBTQ youth were gathered by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network in 2010–2011. LGBTQ youth are bullied or harassed online almost three times as often as are straight youth and are twice as likely to be harassed via text. They felt equally unsafe whether online, at school, or traveling to school. One in four LGBTQ young people reported being bullied online and one in five via text during the past year. Harassed LGBTQ youth report higher rates of depression and of negative self-esteem. When online harassment was combined with harassment in the real world, LGBTQ youth reported lower self-esteem, lower grade point averages, and higher levels of depression. Interestingly, LGBTQ youth also describe the internet as a site for peer support and educational information about sexuality and gender identification and find information there they cannot always readily access in person. LGBTQ youth say they were twice as likely as straight youth to have used the internet for health and medical information and more than twice as likely to have at least one close online friend (GLSEN, 2013).

As this discussion turns now to cyber gender harassment and journalists, we realize harassment also occurs to non-journalists and acknowledge the intersectionality of identities that encompasses online women journalists and other marginalized groups to which they may also belong, such as persons of color, non-Christians, and members of the LGBTQ community. Future research in this field may begin to discern between identities and broaden the scope of knowledge about online harassment.

Consequences of being harassed

After being harassed, women shut down blogs, close Twitter accounts, and leave Facebook (Citron, 2009); harassment causes women to avoid chat rooms (Fallows, 2005). Women fear that online threats of rape and murder will be carried out in real life (Biber et al., 2002). This self-censorship silences women (Mijatović, 2016). One type of harassment, 'doxxing', publishes personal information like home addresses and phone numbers. Women's careers are sabotaged by so many negative comments that potential employers avoid hiring 'problem' employees (Citron, 1999). Verbal and cyber abuse addresses professional women as sexual objects (Abrams, 1998), compromising their reputations as professionals. Some supervisors tell harassed women that it's their private problem to handle (Hagen, 2015). To avoid attacks, some women use gender-neutral names or assume male identities (Yoshino, 2006). Online accounts with feminine usernames receive 100 sexually explicit or threatening messages a day; accounts with masculine usernames receive 3.7 (Meyer and Cukier, 2006). Like domestic violence and physical workplace sexual harassment before it, cyber gender harassment is trivialized by law enforcement (despite the inclusion of rape and death threats and 'Photoshopped' images of women being strangled and

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tortured) and dismissed as 'locker room talk', as just the way the internet works, and as trolls just having fun – all clear signals that violence toward women is acceptable (Citron, 2009.). As more daily functions like socializing, purchasing, reading the news, applying for jobs, and talking with colleagues move to the internet, the civil rights and gender politics of cyberspace become highly significant (ibid.)

How cyberspace is conceptualized

Optimistic assumptions about the internet characterize it as a Habermasian public sphere, a democratic space open to all where freedom of speech reigns and where virtual spaces might sidestep the sexism and racism that face-to-face interactions allow (Oksman and Turtainen, 2004; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). But such assumptions may naïvely background pervasive, unequal gender relations and overlook the internet's capacity for "technology-facilitated sexual violence and harassment", argue Henry and Powell (2015: 762). In digital space, criminal and harmful behaviors can occur in both familiar and new ways (Lash, 1994; Adkins, 1999). The possibility for increasing, rather than decreasing, isolation and inequity exists (Castells, 1997) due to the gender gap in technology and inequity of access (Youngs, 2005; Ono and Zavodny, 2003). The nature of digital spaces has a bearing on how cyber gender harassment is addressed. If the internet is a purely virtual reality, as some scholars argue (Brown, 2006; Youngs, 2005), then the harms sustained there might be considered to be virtual, as well, and not "real" (Williams, 2006). But if the internet is, as video game designer and subject of "Gamergate" online attacks Brianna Wu argues, "the public squares of 2015, where we make professional contacts, hang out with our friends and make meaningful connections" (Wu, 2015: 48), then the harms incurred there are more than ephemeral. Even if the internet is not a geospatial place, it is a socio-spatial one in which people relate, work, and play and one upon which social interactions are increasingly dependent (Youngs, 2005). Victims of cyber gender harassment are often told to ignore the harassment since it is "just words" – however, if those words become acted-upon rape threats, or if nude photos are published or doxxing is part of the harassment, those so-called virtual harms become real-life harms (*Guardian*, 2016).

Conceptions of digital space raise problematic questions about whether or not a realm that does not host bodies can be a site where significant harm can be enacted upon bodies, or at least upon real people living real lives (Henry and Powell, 2015). Socio-spatial locations can host techno-social harms that impact on daily lives and that express very real patriarchal and power relationships that exist in both cyberspace and the physical world (Brown, 2006). Henry and Powell argue that digital harms are distinct harms, though they find only rare examples of such harms being taken as seriously as criminal harms and point to the relative paucity of scholarship of gendered harassment (2015). Technology-facilitated sexual violence needs to be further researched in order to construct a useful foundation for future public policy regarding prevention and punishment.

Domestic violence

In the physical world, most domestic violence victims are women, most perpetrators men, and occurrence is underreported. One in four women are violently attacked in their lifetimes, and 29% of all women are raped, stalked or physically assaulted (Black et al., 2011). Stalking creates long-ranging and costly health consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder, headaches, ulcers, and poor mental health (Black et al., 2011). Stalking is likely to lead to assault and murder, and 76% of women killed violently were stalked by their murderers (McFarlane et al., 1999). Domestic violence has long been cast as the fault of the woman, not the man; we ask "Why does

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she stay?" rather than "Why does he hit?" (Nettleton, 2011). Its social and economic impact has been minimized for more than 200 years, and the history of trivializing physical and emotional damage done to women is even longer (West, 1997). Only relatively recently has research begun to consider domestic violence as more than one woman's failure to find a man who won't hit her and move to more broad examinations of the social forces that make gender violence possible. Weak social and legal support contribute (Coates and Wade, 2007), as does no prominent public attitude that domestic abuse will not be tolerated (Bostock and Plumpton, 2009). Increasingly, domestic violence research points to cultural practices and structures that help naturalize male violence and hold patriarchy in place and that foster implied acceptance of male violence toward women (Bou-Franch and Blitvich, 2014).

Sexual harassment in the physical workplace wasn't even named until the 1970s (West, 1997) and was not linked to Title IX legislation by the U.S. Supreme Court until 1989. Since then, it has been the subject of significant study (Fitzgerald et al., 1995), finding that harassment is about power, not sex (Barak, 2005; Hoffspiegel, 2002); that most victims are women (Paludi and Paludi, 2003); and that the effects are devastating, including reduced work performance, lower productivity, psychological distress, and depression (Dansky and Kilpatrick, 1997), as well as nausea and eating disorders (Harned and Fitzgerald, 2002). There is evidence of post-traumatic stress disordered behavior, such as sleep disturbances, substance abuse, and thoughts of suicide (Avina and O'Donohue, 2002; Davis et al., 2002). Martin positions male violence against women as a direct result of inequities in social and cultural power, rooted in historical attitudes toward women and formative of cultural structures that reinforce patriarchy (1976). Notably, there are two crimes for which the victim is blamed and the attacker is nearly sidelined in responsibility: rape and domestic violence (Cuklanz, 2000).

The ways in which journalism represents domestic violence offer insights into cultural and social attitudes about gender and also assist in buttressing patriarchy and retrograde gender attitudes (Caringella-MacDonald, 1998). Prushank finds that media are so complicit in naturalizing patriarchy "that men find the domination and exploitation of women and other men to be not only expected, but actually demanded" (2007: 161). Sociologist Nancy Berns surveyed women's (1999) and men's (2001) magazine coverage of domestic violence, finding that women were held responsible for the violence men do in ways that de-gender the problem and gender the blame. The violence of men is repositioned as violence in general, with gender excised, but female victims are blamed for victim-like behaviors that are particularly attached to their gender. Ignoring the role of the attacker's gender while focusing on the victim's gender repositions the issue of men attacking women as being a woman's private problem, caused by her poor choices (Berns, 1999). This assists in keeping patriarchy and male privilege out of discussions of domestic violence (Berns, 2001). A 10-year study of 10 leading women's and men's magazines found that magazines blame women for being with violent men and do not hold men responsible for being violent, with men's magazines treating domestic violence as a joke, using it as a source of humor and mocking women's concerns (Nettleton, 2011). Newspaper articles blame domestic violence victims for their own deaths (Consalvo, 1998; Meyers, 1994). Women are counseled to create escape plans, change their names, and move their children and jobs to avoid angry partners, and men are not counseled on any ways in which they might temper rage or stop hitting women (Nettleton, 2011). Such blaming tactics may serve to excuse or even encourage male violence and contribute to an environment in which men feel free to behave violently (Lowney and Best, 1995; Maguigan, 1991).

As this review of the literature contributing to discussions of cyber gender harassment demonstrates, research focused on the harassment of marginalized groups, such as women or LGBTQ persons, is limited, but growing. Compelling evidence suggests that the internet is the newest location for male intimidation of and violence against women, and unique harms are enabled

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by new technologies. Legal boundaries about hate speech, slander, libel, and harassment online are evolving with the technology, and scholarly investigation and argumentation about such boundaries is to be expected in law, media ethics, free speech, journalism, and feminist media studies journals, as well. It is promising that the literature on physical domestic violence points in directions likely to be helpful for digital media scholars, and it is hopeful that the existing body of work on patriarchy's role in domestic violence provides a useful foundation for emerging cyber gender harassment research.

Cyber gender harassment examples and effects

Several cases of cyber gender harassment in recent years provide specific information about the nature and tenor of online harassment, the typical reactions of law enforcement (when it is brought in), and the consequences for and effects of harassment for the women victims. A viral YouTube video public service announcement, "#MoreThanMean – Women in Sports 'Face' Harassment", shows men (not the harassers) reading tweets sent to sports reporters Sarah Spain and Julie DiCaro (Just Not Sports, 2016). Spain was an accomplished high school and college athlete and a radio and TV reporter and host in Chicago before joining ESPN in 2010; she has written and spoken on air about sexual harassment she's suffered on the job (Joseph, 2016). Julie DiCaro was an attorney in Chicago before becoming a baseball blogger covering the Chicago Cubs, a weekend radio host, and anchor and a columnist for CBSChicago.com; she wrote an account of being raped for the Huffington Post in 2013 (DiCaro, 2013). Reading the ugly words written by other men, the discomfort of these 'regular guys' is obvious. They squirm, swallow hard, look at the floor, take deep breaths, apologize, and look off-camera for direction. They read: "One of the players should beat you to death with their hockey stick like the whore you are", "This is why we don't hire any females unless we need our cocks sucked or our food cooked", "fuck this dumb cunt", "hopefully this skank Julie DiCaro is Bill Cosby's next victim", "I hope your boyfriend beats you", "I hope you get raped again", and "you need to be hit in the head with a hockey puck and killed" (Just Not Sports, 2016).

Another well-publicized case of cyber gender harassment attack is '#Gamergate'. Beginning as an ex-boyfriend's personal blog about video game developer Zoë Quinn, it evolved into a campaign against feminism in the gaming industry and expanded to attack other women developers and designers and games journalists, using the hashtag #GamerGate in various social media outlets and on websites. The organized, targeted attack was launched in August 2014, surfacing on Reddit, 8chan, 4chan, and other platforms that allowed anonymous comments and postings. Women were threatened with murder, rape, and exposure of personal information online. Game developer Brianna Wu reported that people threatened her pets, called her phone while they were masturbating, posted photographs of her friend's children on a pedophile forum, and falsely reported a friend for criminal activity that resulted in a SWAT team being sent to her home (a cyberharassment technique called 'swatting'). Wu wrote, "There is no free speech when speaking about your experiences leads to death threats, doxing and having armed police sent to your house [. . .] online spaces are not safe for women" (Wu, 2015: 48).

Journalist Caroline Criado-Perez campaigned for the Bank of England to add women to the historical figures featured on banknotes. Then the death and rape threats began.

> threats to mutilate my genitals, threats to slit my throat, to bomb my house, to pistol-whip me and burn me alive. I was told I would have poles shoved up my vagina, dicks shoved down my throat. I was told I would be begging to die, as a man would ejaculate in my eyeballs.
>
> *(Criado-Perez, 2015: 13)*

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Since much of the attack imagery was to her mouth and throat, she concluded the attackers had one goal: to get her to stop talking (ibid.). She did not. She retweeted her harassers' tweets, attracted media attention, reported to the police, and asked Twitter to step in. Twitter placed responsibility on the police, who placed responsibility on Twitter (Hess, 2014). Eventually, Scotland Yard arrested three men, but the harassment continued (ibid.).

A senior contributor at *The Federalist* and columnist at *The Forward*, Bethany Mandel is a conservative blogger who criticized Donald Trump during his presidential campaign. She also often writes about Jewish issues. She has been deluged with harassing tweets, once so many so quickly that they "had to have been sophisticated coordination, they arrived within minutes of each other, a deluge" (Personal interview, 2017). Via Twitter and Facebook, she's received anti-Semitic messages and death threats, including a threat to behead her baby (ibid.). She reported the harassment to her small-town police department, which "blew me off" until she contacted the Jewish Federation, which had connections to Homeland Security, which contacted her local police. "Then the cops contacted me and took it seriously," she says. "They did drive-bys for a long time, and I was on their radar. We had a conversation about swatting, how they should respond, so they were cognizant of it as being a thing that might be done to me" (ibid.). Eventually, Mandel bought a gun and wrote about it, alerting her harassers (Mandel, 2016). When the Anti-Defamation League examined an upsurge in anti-Semitic hate language in social media, Mandel and fellow journalists Julie Iofff and Dana Schwartz contributed their stories about their cyber gender harassment. Mandel noticed that, among the larger group of journalists who spoke with the ADL, men who had been harassed were powerful editors of their own publications, but women who had been harassed were freelancers, further down the publishing ladder. "We were viewed as equally dangerous as those men, and that says something", said Mandel. "[Harassers] will push back against any woman who is a journalist, but they only targeted the upper echelons of the men. They took the time to target us with the same velocity" (Personal interview, 2017).

A *Pacific Standard* piece by Amanda Hess, who has also written for *Slate*, ESPN, and *Wired*, won the 2014 American Society of Magazine Editors award in the public interest category for "Why Women Aren't Welcome on the Internet". It detailed her own harassment: "Im [sic] looking you up, and when I find you, im going to rape you and remove your head", "I did 12 years for 'manslaughter', I killed a woman, like you, who decided to make fun of guys [sic] cocks", "[I'll put you and another feminist] in a gimp mask and tied to each other 69 so the bitches can't talk or move and go round the world, any old port in a storm, any old hole" (2014). Hess also reported examples of harassment visited on journalist colleagues: "you are clearly retarded, i hope someone shoots then rapes you" . . . "i hope someone slits your throat and cums down your gob" . . . "A BOMB HAS BEEN PLACED OUTSIDE YOUR HOME. IT WILL GO OFF AT EXACTLY 10:47 PM ON A TIMER AND TRIGGER DESTROYING EVERYTHING" (ibid., *errors in original*). When Hess reported the harassment, a police officer asked, "What is Twitter?"

A study launched by the UK newspaper the *Guardian* (2016) examined 70 million comments left on its news site since 2006. It found that the 10 most abused writers were women (four white, four non-white, two gay, one Muslim, one Jew) and the other two were black men (one gay). The 10 least-abused writers were all men. LGBTQ people and ethnic and religious minorities were also targeted. Avalanches of harassment cascade across all social media: "To the person targeted, it can feel like the perpetrator is everywhere: at home, in the office, on the bus, in the street" (The Guardian, 2016).

Some women are targeted for expressing opinions about controversial matters like immigration or LGBTQ rights, but others are harassed for innocuous content. One food blogger posted a pretzel recipe and received "I hope you choke on your own pretzels and die, you bitch" (Mantilla, 2015: 30).

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Discussion

Although digital technology makes possible new ways of being violent toward women, online harassment and domestic violence are similar subordinations. Their commonalities include:

- Women are held responsible for the violence that men do.
- Attacked women are patronized by law enforcement and others and told to ignore attacks and dismiss threats.
- Proposed 'solutions' are the woman's responsibility to carry out and are aimed at disciplining and containing women rather than solving the problem. The chief way offered to 'solve' domestic violence is to raise money to fund shelters, which does nothing to halt violence. Commonly suggested ways to 'solve' cyber gender violence include closing social media accounts (yet this is the workplace for women journalists), changing their online names (the professional brand of journalists), and treating harassment as harmless joking.
- Women under physical and cyber attacks are positioned as helpless victims, and male attackers are positioned as able to escape with few consequences, reifying characterizations of women as ineffectual and reinforcing a sense of male entitlement to freely harass women.

Certain conditions of new delivery modes of journalism – comments sections, Twitter feeds, and Facebook interactions – offer harassers opportunity to elevate their sense of self-importance by writing directly to 'famous' journalists and becoming published themselves. Reader comments blur distinctions between those who produce media and those who consume it. The responses to the message *become* the message; harassers become media producers, no matter how incompetent or unintelligible, and commenters are held to no professional accountability to be accurate, fair, civil, or nonviolent. Technological revolution is not necessary progressive. As the digital future of journalism is imagined in terms of business models, organizational structures, and evolving technologies, considerations of how to correct inequities of identities and of social and cultural power in representation, staffing, and ownership too often remain unaddressed. Destructive expressions of power and subordination are currently – not permanently, hopefully – more readily published and far less challenged in the digital realm than in the physical. Digital journalism promises brave new possibilities but cannot afford to overlook the persistent and troubling issues of intimidation and marginalization that have been problematic in free speech for the history of media. However, to date, these critical issues are not front and center in most futuristic imaginings of journalism.

Like rape, cyber gender harassment is about power, not sex. Sexual imagery and language are used to debase women and reify the patriarchal power of being able to attack, mock, shame, and threaten with few consequences. Harassers are drawn to the 'celebrity' of seeing their harassment published. The potential for setting a violent and misogynistic tone for a comment section offers a kind of perverted type of power. A voyeuristic opportunity is offered to those who read but do not participate in posting harassing comments. Audiences are invited to gaze on the sexually displayed cyber bodies of female journalists and witness their sexual humiliation. Sexualizing and weakening professional women moves them out of position as powerful, independent, self-actualized human beings and places them where male partners are essential, in pairs of sexual or violent activity.

Narratives of the attacked female journalist as being unable to interest law enforcement and internet platform administrators in her plight surely encourages additional online violence. Male harassers feel free to threaten with impunity. Ironically, the victims' stories of frustrating and failed attempts to get meaningful responses from law enforcement or internet platforms bear witness to how readily women can be attacked online, serving as a teaching manual for how to harass women and get away with it, and grant permission to continue harassing unabated.

A critical absence in the conversation

Although domestic violence is a "product of gender inequality and the lesser status of women compared to men" (Jewkes, 2002: 253), this cause is rarely pointed out in discussions of how to limit or contain cyber gender harassment. Decades have been spent blaming women for being hit and killed by men, but little time has been spent addressing the root causes of male violence and patriarchy. With cyber gender harassment, there is an opportunity to avoid repeating this same mistake in logic and justice. Yet the word 'patriarchy' only rarely surfaces in discussions of gendered online violence. Following Stuart Hall, absences in representation can reveal prevailing and resistant cultural attitudes and assumptions (Hall, 1992). Looking for what has been rendered invisible, listening for what has been silenced, can create 'aha!' moments of insight and clarity. It is more than telling – it is a klaxon horn sounding – that patriarchy and the imposition of male power remain under-discussed in issues of cyber gender harassment. Patriarchy's role in creating a culture that values and allows male violence and which persistently positions and repositions women as subservient deserves unapologetic illumination. When the conversation shifts from terrified women journalists to stories of criminal male harassers, the light will have been turned on.

Recommendations from victims and researchers

Research about cyber gender harassment is still young; recommendations are still limited but do include insights from sociological, feminist, and media studies perspectives, along with anecdotal experience of harassment victims.

Cultural and social

- Deliver messages of and practice zero tolerance.
- Teach children not to create hostile digital communication before complacent attitudes become entrenched.
- Increase the numbers of women in the public sphere to make them commonplace rather than threatening.
- Socialize boys differently, defining masculinity in ways other than dominance over women.
- Stop overlooking and trivializing harms to women.

Legal

- Train law enforcement in cyber practices, legalities, and threats.
- Track down IP locations, knock on doors, and order harassers to cease and desist.
- Impose significant consequences on harassers: fines, injunctions, and criminal convictions.
- Create a cyber civil rights agenda employing criminal, tort, and antidiscrimination laws.
- Treat cyberharassment as serious discrimination so more women report it and law enforcement acts on it.
- Treat with equal seriousness online and offline crimes.

Government

- Avoid censorship but recognize cyber gender harassment as a direct attack on freedom of expression.
- Commission the collection and analysis of data related to online harassment.

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Online journalists

- Proactively moderate comment sections.
- Report harassment to internet platform administration and law enforcement.

Online users

- Speak directly against harassment to abusers, especially men-to-men.
- Initiate constructive comments on articles to set a reasonable tone.

Media organizations and websites

- Create corporate cultures of gender equality and zero tolerance of harassment.
- Work with journalist unions to provide support systems, psychosocial and legal assistance, and industry-wide guidelines.
- Implement consistent, transparent procedures of moderating comments.
- Use pop-up messages and banners to communicate and enforce anti-harassment policies.
- Investigate harassing messages – particularly when delivered in orchestrated deluges – identify IP addresses, and report them to proper authorities.
- Make terms of service, community guidelines, and enforcement consequences proportionate, understandable, and easily available to all users.
- Compile data and statistics on online abuse to help facilitate comprehensive research.

Technology and the internet hold the promise of potential freedoms from traditional, physical-world limitations of identity, but the real-world attitudes toward identity are carried into cyberspace by the humans who use it. While a woman's work might exist without a physical body on the internet, the harms visited upon her there have very real consequences to intimidate, injure, and silence her.

Further reading

Danielle Citron's (2014) *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace* (and her entire body of work on this topic) is authoritative and more expansive than this chapter can include. Azy Barak's *Psychological Aspects of Cyberspace* (2008) explores the psychological aspects of cyberspace. For a detailed analysis of media characterizations of domestic violence, see my own "Domestic Violence in Men's and Women's Magazines: Women are Guilty of Choosing the Wrong Man, Men Are Not Guilty of Hitting Women" at http://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=comm_fac.

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